



CALIFORNIA MEDICINE & PUBLIC HEALTH INITIATIVE

June 14, 2005

Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger
State Capitol Building
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Governor Schwarzenegger:

The Steering Committee of the California Medicine and Public Health Initiative (CMPHI) was very disappointed to learn of the resignation of our State Public Health Officer, Richard Joseph Jackson, MD, MPH. Dr. Jackson has provided much respected professional leadership, expert knowledge, and a wealth of experience to the California Department of Health Services (CDHS).

As you begin the recruitment of a successor to Dr. Jackson, the Steering Committee strongly recommends that you propose establishing a separate Department or Center for Public Health with a State Health Officer reporting directly to you and that you also propose a broadly representative State Board of Health to advise and support the State Health Officer. The Steering Committee has noted on many occasions that the CDHS seems overwhelmingly preoccupied with the Medi-Cal program and other non-public health programs. Separating Public Health from current CDHS has been recommended by numerous organizations, including the Little Hoover Commission, your California Performance Review, the Northern and Southern California Public Health Associations, the Public Health Institute, the Health Officers Association of California, the California Conference of Local Health Officers, and the California Medical Association.

The Steering Committee of CMPHI has become increasingly concerned over the deterioration of California's public health system. The staffing and performance capacities of the Public Health components of CDHS have decreased significantly over the past ten years. Data from CDHS presented to the Little Hoover Commission at its May 26, 2005 hearing revealed that the Department has lost nearly 11% of its professional and scientific staff positions (physicians, nurses, research scientists, epidemiologists) since FY 2000-01. Without new positions funded by federal Bioterrorism preparedness funding, that loss would have exceeded 15%, or one of eight positions. As you know, a state public health department must be the central resource for data, laboratory services, professional expertise, and emergency response to health threats such as West Nile Virus, influenza, HIV, and chronic diseases. The Department plays critical roles in health planning, policy development, health promotion, and environmental health protection. It also provides leadership and support to California's 61 local health departments, many of which are also in serious decline. However, years of budget cuts, cuts in training and continuing education, increasing workloads, non-competitive salaries, resignations and retirements have badly eroded our public health resources at the State level.

We know that you understand the value of strong health promotion and disease prevention capacities in addressing health threats, eliminating health disparities, and promoting a healthy California. We ask that you provide both your leadership and your personal support in restoring the excellence and capacity of our State public health programs.

However, merely establishing a separate Department or Center of Public Health is not sufficient to reverse the years of decline.. We ask that you also establish a multi-year timetable for restoring lost capacity as well as developing and investing new resources in our public and environmental health programs. We believe that your plan should address staffing, professional recruitment and training, information technology, data and information, administrative capacity, and scientific and professional excellence.

The Steering Committee stands ready to work directly with you and your staff on these critically important issues. We offer our assistance to you and we also would like to request the opportunity of meeting with you and your staff..

Please do not wait until a health disaster reveals how far the deterioration of our public health system has gone. We need your leadership and direct involvement in rebuilding California's public health system.

Sincerely yours,



Ellen Alkon, MD, MPH
Co-Chair of the Steering Committee



Michael Sexton, MD
Co-Chair of the Steering Committee



Glennah Trochet, MD
Co-Chair of the Steering Committee

cc: S. Kimberly Belshe, Secretary
California Health and Human Services Agency

Sandra Shewry, Director
California Department of Health Services

Honorable Members,
California Legislature

Michael E. Alpert
Chair, Little Hoover Commission